

Religion, Philosophy, and the Arts

Prepare to Read

Objectives

In this section you will

1. Identify the religious beliefs of the ancient Greeks.
2. Explore how the Greeks searched for knowledge about the world.
3. Describe the relationship between the rise of democracy and the spread of new ideas in Greek city-states.

Taking Notes

As you read, look for details about the religion, philosophy, and the arts of the ancient Greeks. Use a copy of the outline below to record your findings.

I. The Golden Age of Athens

A. Period from 479 to 431 B.C.

B. Sources of wealth

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

II. Ancient Greek religious beliefs



Target Reading Skill

Recognize Sequence

Signal Words Signals point out relationships among ideas or events. This section discusses life in the Golden Age of Athens. To help keep the relationship between leaders, thinkers, and writers clear, look for words like *first*, *at that time*, and *in [date]* that signal the order in which these people were active.

Key Terms

- **tribute** (TRIB yoot) *n.* a payment made by a less powerful state or nation to a more powerful one

- **immortal** (ih MAWR tul) *n.* someone or something that lives forever
- **oracle** (AWH uh kul) *n.* in ancient Greece, a sacred site used to consult a god or goddess; any priest or priestess who spoke for the gods
- **philosopher** (fih LAHS uh fur) *n.* someone who used reason to understand the world; in Greece the earliest philosophers used reason to explain natural events
- **tragedy** (TRAJ uh dee) *n.* a type of serious drama that ends in disaster for the main character

The Athenian leader Pericles (PEHR uh kleez) reminded the citizens that Athens was unique.

“Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighboring states. We are a pattern to other cities rather than imitators. Our constitution favors the many instead of the few. That is why it is called a democracy. If we look at the laws, we see they give equal justice to all. . . . Poverty does not bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state. . . . In short, I say that as a city we are the school for all Greece.”

— The History of the Peloponnesian War
Thucydides

Pericles' words had special meaning: They were spoken during the first year of a war with Sparta, another Greek city-state. Eventually, it was conflict with Sparta that ended Athens' golden age of accomplishment.



Pericles led the Athenians in peace and war. The helmet he wears reminds us that he was a skilled general.

The Golden Age of Athens

The years from 479 B.C. to 431 B.C. are called the Golden Age of Athens. During the Golden Age, Athens grew rich from trade and from silver mined by slaves in regions around the city. Tribute, or payments made to Athens by its allies, added to its wealth.

Athenians also made important achievements in the arts, philosophy, and literature, and democracy reached its high point. For about 30 years during the Golden Age, Pericles was the most powerful man in Athenian politics. This well-educated, intelligent man had the best interests of his city at heart. When he made speeches to the Athenians, he could move and persuade them.

Pericles was a member of an aristocratic family, but he supported democracy. Around 460 B.C., he became leader of a democratic group. He introduced reforms that strengthened democracy. The most important change was to have the city pay a salary to its officials. This meant that poor citizens could afford to hold public office.

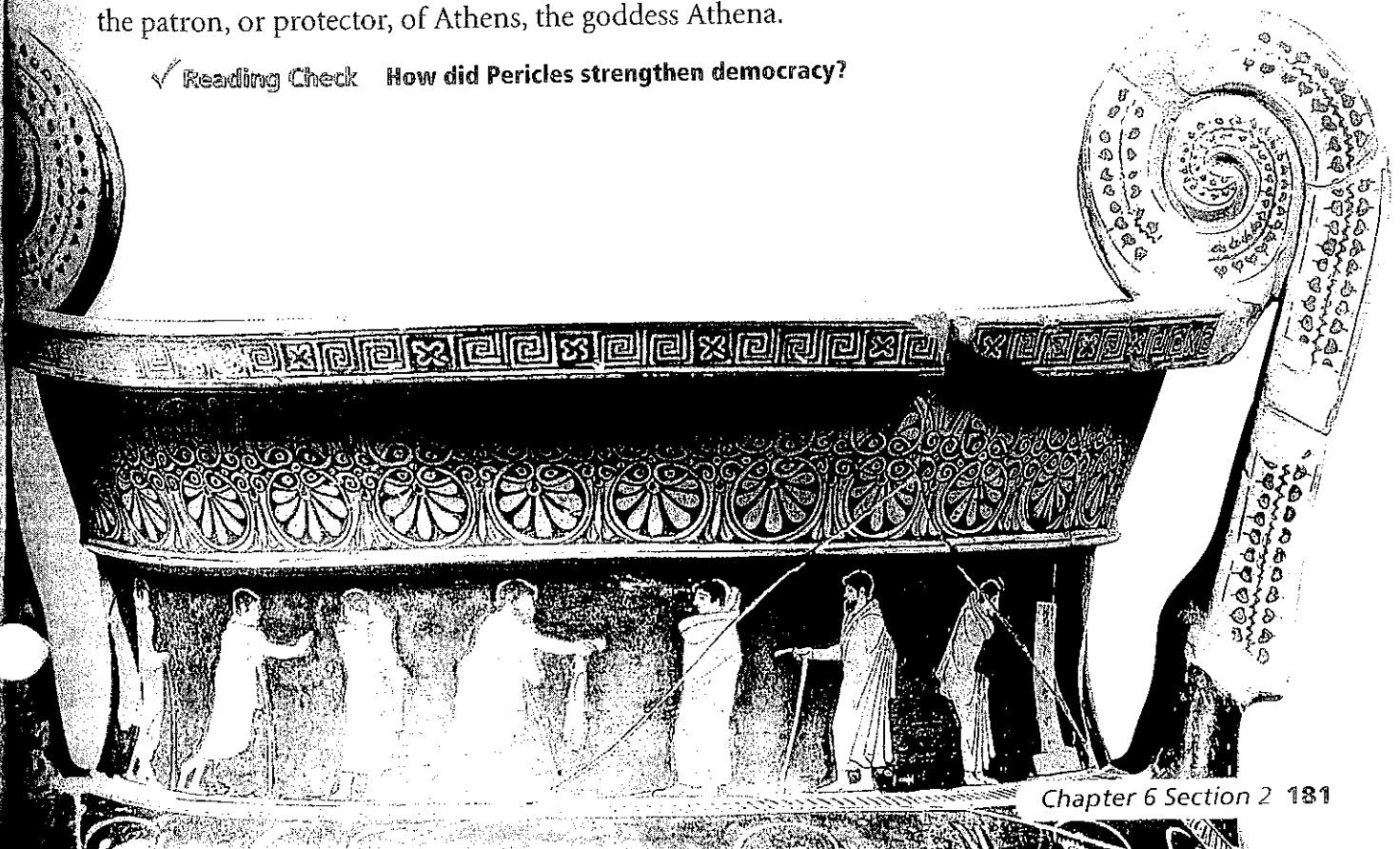
One of the greatest accomplishments under the rule of Pericles was the construction of the Parthenon (PAHR tuh nahn) between 447 and 432 B.C. The construction of the Parthenon was part of the general reconstruction of the Acropolis at Athens. Many of the buildings there had been destroyed by invaders from Persia about three decades earlier. The Parthenon was a temple built to honor the patron, or protector, of Athens, the goddess Athena.



An ancient Athenian silver coin bearing an owl, a symbol of the city

✓ Reading Check How did Pericles strengthen democracy?

A vase depicting citizenship in Athens



Ancient Greek Religious Beliefs

Greeks worshiped a family of gods and goddesses called the Twelve Olympians (oh LIM pea unz). Each ruled different areas of human life and the natural world. The chart titled "A Family of Gods" gives you more information about some of the Olympians.

The Greeks took great care when honoring their gods. They wished to give thanks and to receive blessings. They also tried to avoid angering the gods.

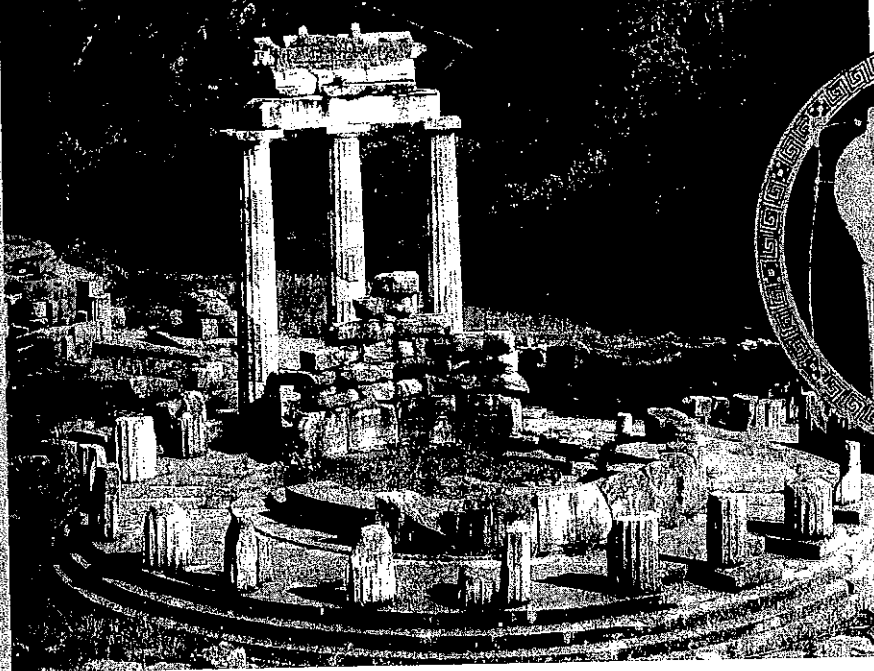
Gods and Goddesses Wherever the Greeks lived, they built temples to the gods. Because the gods had human forms, they also had many human characteristics. The main difference between gods and humans was that the gods were immortal, which meant they lived forever. They also had awesome power.

Mythology tells us that the Greeks worshiped gods led by Zeus, the king of the gods. From Mt. Olympus, Greece's highest mountain, Zeus ruled the gods and humanity. In addition to worshiping gods, the Greeks also honored mythical heroes like Achilles (uh KIL eez), whose great deeds are told in the *Iliad*.

Although the Greeks worshiped all their gods, each city-state honored one of the twelve gods, in part by building a temple to that god. Athena (uh THEE nuh), for example, was the patron goddess of Athens. The Greeks also honored their gods by holding festivals and by sacrificing animals and offering food to the gods. To honor Zeus, the city-states came together every four years for an Olympian festival and games. Modern Olympic Games are based on this tradition.

Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, and Artemis are shown in this relief.





Delphi

The Tholos Temple at the Sanctuary of Athena Pronaia was once the gateway to Delphi. In the vase painting, Aegeus, a legendary Athenian king, consults a priestess at Apollo's oracle in Delphi. **Conclude** Why did the ancient Greeks visit oracles?

The Oracles In ancient cultures, people often looked to their gods for signs or advice. They wanted the gods to show them how to live or how to behave. The Greeks visited *oracles*, sacred sites where it was believed the gods spoke. At these shrines, the people would ask the gods to give them advice or to reveal the future. Sometimes the advice came through dreams. Often a response would come in the form of a riddle, delivered by priests or priestesses thought to be capable of hearing the voice of the gods. Oracles of various gods were located throughout Greece. Heads of state often sought advice on governing and wars from the oracle of the god Apollo at Delphi (DEL fy), an ancient town in central Greece. Because such advice was taken very seriously, the oracles had a great impact on Greek history.

✓ Reading Check How did the Greeks honor their gods?

Chart Skills

The Greeks believed the world was ruled by gods and goddesses. Ten of them are listed in the table below.

Identify Who was considered to be the leader of all gods and goddesses?

Analyze Why do you think this chart is titled "A Family of Gods?"

A Family of Gods

Zeus (zoos)	Ruler of all gods and humanity
Hera (HIHR uh)	Goddess of marriage and childbirth
Apollo (uh PAHL oh)	God of music, poetry
Artemis (AHR tuh mis)	Goddess of hunting
Athena (uh THEE nuh)	Goddess of wisdom and war
Ares (EHR eez)	God of war
Aphrodite (af ruh DY tee)	Goddess of love
Hermes (HUR meez)	Messenger of the gods
Poseidon (poh SY dun)	God of earthquakes and the ocean
Demeter (dih MEE tur)	Goddess of fertility

The Search for Knowledge

Most Greeks believed that their gods were responsible for all natural events. But a few thinkers disagreed. About 150 years before the Golden Age of Athens, some people thought about new ways to understand the world.

Greek Science and Philosophy You learned earlier about philosophy, which is a system of beliefs or values. Philosophers believed that people could use the powers of the mind and reason to understand natural events. One of the first philosophers, Thales (THAY leez), believed that water was the basic material of the world. Everything was made from it. Over the years, various philosophers had other ideas about the universe. They did not do experiments. But they were careful observers and good thinkers. Democritus (dih MAHK ruh tus), who lived in the 400s B.C., thought that everything was made of tiny particles he called atoms. More than 2,000 years later, modern science showed that he had been correct.

Socrates During the Golden Age and later, several important philosophers taught in Athens. One was a man called Socrates (SAHK ruh teez). People in the marketplace of Athens could not help but notice this sturdy, round-faced man. He was there at all hours of the day, eagerly discussing wisdom and goodness.

Socrates wanted people to consider the true meaning of qualities such as justice and courage. To do this, he asked questions that made others think about their beliefs. Sometimes they became angry because Socrates often showed them that they didn't know what they were talking about. "Know thyself" was his most important lesson.



Recognize Sequence and Signal Words

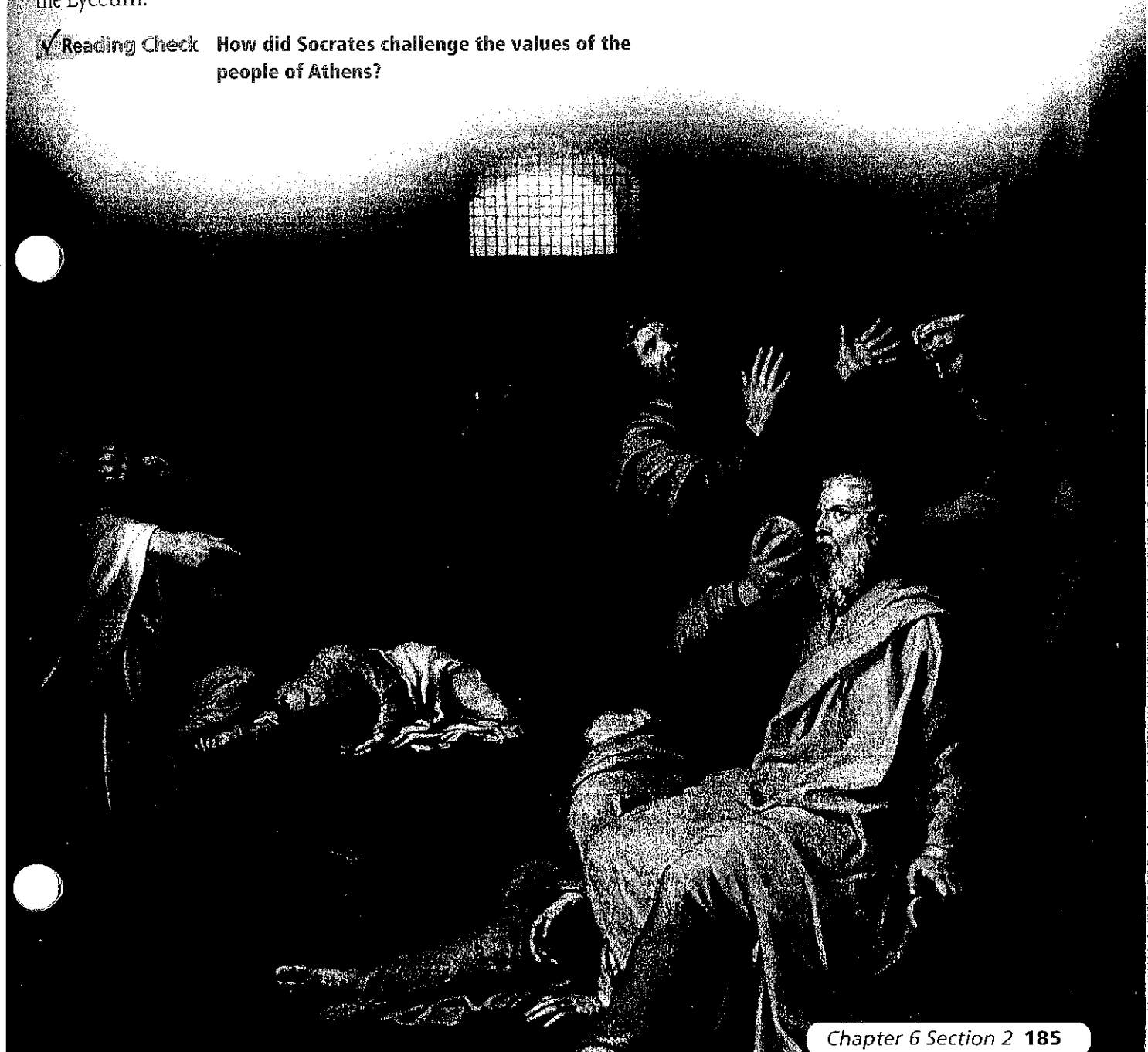
What words signal that Democritus lived in the same century as Pericles?



In 399 B.C., Socrates was brought to trial. The authorities accused him of dishonoring the gods and misleading young people. He was sentenced to death by forced suicide, a common sentence in Athens at the time. Socrates drank a cup of hemlock, a poison, and died.

Plato and Aristotle Much of what is known about Socrates comes from the writings of Plato (PLAY toh), one of his students. Socrates' death caused Plato to mistrust democracy. In *The Republic*, Plato wrote that society should be made up of three groups: workers, soldiers, and philosopher-rulers. Plato founded a school in Athens called the Academy, where he taught a student named Aristotle (AR uh staht ul). Aristotle believed that reason should guide the pursuit of knowledge. He later founded his own school, the Lyceum.

✓ **Reading Check** How did Socrates challenge the values of the people of Athens?



Links to

Math

The Golden Rectangle

Greek architects based the design of their buildings on a figure called the Golden Rectangle. A Golden Rectangle is one with the long sides about one and two-thirds times the length of the short sides. The Greeks thought Golden Rectangles made buildings more pleasing to look at. Modern architects have also used the Golden Rectangle.

The Acropolis

Once the religious center of Athens, the Acropolis now serves as a monument to Greek architecture.

1 The Propylaea, the entrance to the Acropolis, was completed in 432 B.C.

2 The Odeion (theater) of Herodes Atticus was built in A.D. 161.

3 The Erechtheion, named after a legendary king of Athens, was completed in 406 B.C.

4 Completed in 438 B.C., the Parthenon served as a temple to Athena, the patron goddess of Athens.

Predict Why do you think the Athenians built the Acropolis?

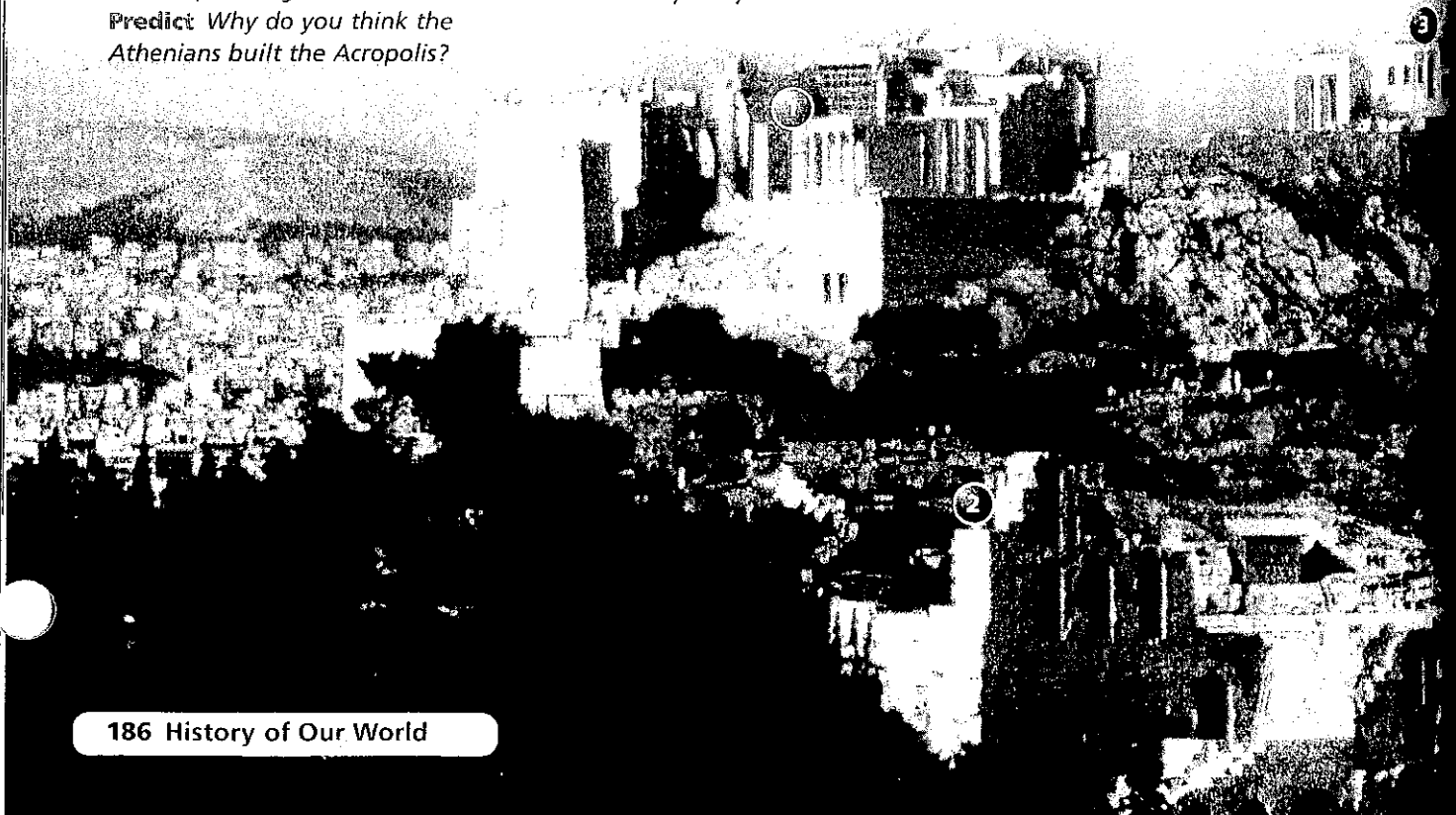
Visual and Dramatic Arts

The ancient Greeks devoted great attention to their arts. The Greeks used visual arts, such as architecture and sculpture, to glorify and honor their gods. The ancient Greeks are also known as the first playwrights, people who write dramas.

The Parthenon Today, the Athenian leader Pericles is probably best known for making Athens a beautiful city. The Acropolis, the religious center of Athens, had been destroyed in 480 B.C., during one of the city's many wars. Pericles decided to rebuild the Acropolis and create new buildings to glorify the city.

The builders of the new Acropolis brought Greek architecture to its highest point. Their most magnificent work was the Parthenon, a temple to the goddess Athena. The temple was made of fine marble. Rows of columns surrounded it on all four sides. Within the columns was a room that held the statue of Athena, made of wood, ivory, and gold. The statue rose 40 feet (12 m), as high as a four-story building.

The great statue of Athena disappeared long ago. However, much of the sculpture on the inside and outside of the temple still exists. Many of the scenes that decorate the Parthenon have three important characteristics. First, they are full of action. Second, the artist carefully arranged the figures to show balance and order. Third, the sculptures are lifelike and accurate. However, they are ideal, or perfect, views of humans and animals. These characteristics reflect the goal of Greek art. This goal was to present images of perfection in a balanced and orderly way.

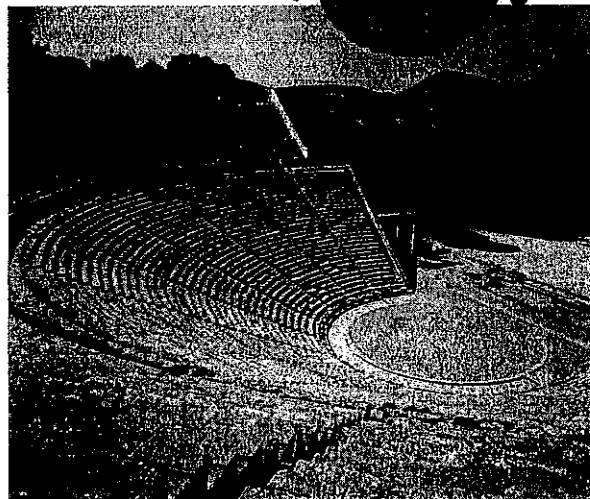


Dramas In addition to their achievements in architecture and sculpture, Athenians were the first people known to write dramas. Among the city's greatest achievements were the plays written and produced in the 400s B.C., during the Golden Age.

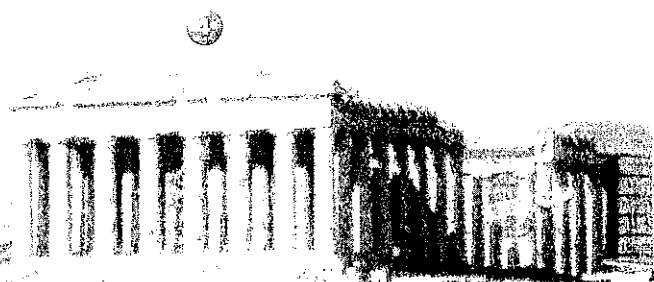
Some of the most famous Greek plays were tragedies. A tragedy is a serious story that usually ends in disaster for the main character. Often, tragedies told of fictional humans who were destroyed when forced to make impossible choices. A Greek tragedy consisted of several scenes that featured the characters of the story. Between the scenes, a chorus chanted or sang poems. In most plays, the author used the chorus to give background information, comment on the events, or praise the gods.

Comedies During the 400s B.C. in Athens, poets wrote comedies that made fun of well-known citizens and politicians and also made jokes about the customs of the day. Because of the freedom in Athens, people accepted the humor and jokes.

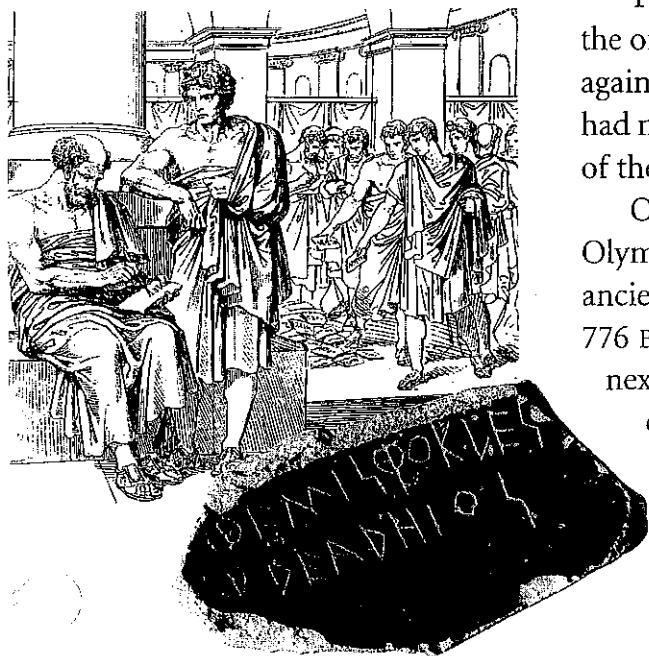
✓ **Reading Check** What was the role of the chorus in Greek drama?



Greek actors performed in outdoor theaters, such as the one shown above at Epidauros. By using different masks, such as the one at top, actors could play a variety of roles.



Aristides, a general at the Battle of Marathon, writes his name for someone who wants him banished from Athens. Inset photo is of a voting tablet used in Aristides' trial.



Many City-States, One People

The citizens of Greek city-states such as Athens had strong patriotic feelings and valued their freedoms. For these reasons, they took a very active role in their government. They were able to develop new ideas in philosophy, religion, government, and the arts in part because of the value they placed on free thinking. The spread of education and growing wealth through trade with Egypt, Sicily, and other places gave the Greeks the freedom to explore new ideas.

Though Athens was the most important city-state, it was not the only one in Greece at this time. City-states in Greece competed against one another, but their citizens spoke the same language and had many of the same customs. They thought of themselves as part of the same people, calling themselves Hellenes.

One example of the common culture of the city-states was the Olympic Games, which were held every four years throughout ancient Greece. The first recorded Olympic Games were held in 776 B.C. Other Olympic Games were held fairly regularly over the next thousand years. Athletes from city-states around Greece competed for prizes in competitions in running, horse racing, boxing, and many other events.

✓ **Reading Check** What role did education and growing wealth play in the development of philosophy and the arts in ancient Greece?



Section 2 Assessment

Key Terms

Review the key terms listed at the beginning of this section. Use each term in a sentence that explains its meaning.



Target Reading Skill

Review the section "The Search for Knowledge" on pages 184–185. Find the words that signal time related to the lives of the philosophers.

Comprehension and Critical Thinking

1. (a) **Define** What was the Golden Age of Athens?

(b) **Draw Conclusions** Why do you think Pericles called Athens "the school of all Greece"?

2. (a) **Explain** How did the Greeks attempt to understand the world?

(b) **Explore Details** What did Socrates mean when he said, "Know thyself"?

3. (a) **Explain** What characteristics did people in city-states throughout Greece share?

(b) **Infer** How did the growth of wealth through trade contribute to the spread of new ideas in Greece?

Writing Activity

Write a brief essay describing the achievements of Athenians during the Golden Age.

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